



American Legion  
**MEL BAHER**  
COMMISSIONER



American Veterans  
**FRANK POCCHI**  
COMMISSIONER



Disabled American Veterans  
**VACANT**  
COMMISSIONER



Veterans of Foreign Wars  
**JAMES RILEY**  
COMMISSIONER



Vietnam Veterans of America  
**BOB POTTS**  
COMMISSIONER

**JON REISS**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**FERONNE WILLIAMS**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

## Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission

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1849 Prospect Avenue • Suite 150 • Cleveland, OH 44115

### MINUTES

DATE/TIME: March 6, 2024 9:30 a.m.

PRESENT: Mel Baher, President  
James Riley, Vice President  
Frank Pocchi, Secretary  
Bob Potts, Commissioner  
Jon Reiss, Executive Director  
Feronne Williams, Deputy Director  
Mary Kitko, Executive Secretary  
Craig Morice, Assistant County Prosecutor

EXCUSED: None.

VISITORS: None.

PURPOSE: GENERAL MONTHLY MEETING

The meeting was called to order by President Mel Baher with the Pledge of Allegiance. Secretary Frank Pocchi called roll.

A motion was made by Jim Riley to dispense with the reading of the Consent Agenda and to accept the agenda with the necessary corrections and/or additions (All Commissioners have a copy of the minutes). Motion seconded by Bob Potts. Discussion: None.

AYES: Baher, Pocchi, Potts, Riley. NAYS: None. Motion carried.

### COMMISSIONERS REPORTS

#### Mel Baher – American Legion

- February 8, 2024 - attended the Post 91 membership meeting held at 7:00 p.m.
  - presented financial reports as Post Finance Officer
  - Post 91 made the following donations:
    - \$25,000 to Berea Community Outreach
    - \$ 5,000 to Berea Animal Rescue
    - \$ 5,000 to Wags 4 Kids
- February 22, 2024 – attended the Post 91 Executive Board meeting held at 7:00 p.m.
  - presented updated financial reports as Post Finance Officer
- February 25, 2024 – left for Washington, DC to attend the American Legion National Legislative conference held at the Washington Hilton on Monday, February 26 and Tuesday, February 27, 2024. The American Legion Legislative Agenda for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress is:
  1. Suicide Prevention and Mental Health for Active Duty and all veterans.

2. Alternative Treatments for Veterans experiencing drug or alcohol disorder.
3. VA Health Care Modernization – implement electronic health records.
4. PACT Act Implementation and oversight – claim wait is as much as 157 days.
5. Safeguard Veterans Benefits – Stop persons or companies charging veterans to file and prepare claims WITHOUT VA accreditation.
6. Concurrent Receipt – STOP VA compensation being deducted from DOD retirement pay for veterans with service-connected disabilities less than 50%.
7. Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity – When federally activated they should NOT be deprived of education benefits as earned by current active-duty members.
8. GI Bill for Honorable Service – make “general under honorable conditions” equal for VA education assistance benefits the same as “Honorable.”
9. Military Quality of Life – provide proper compensation, appropriate housing, quality healthcare, reasonably priced commissaries, and childcare services.
10. Pay the Coast Guard – guarantee pay to personnel during ANY shutdown.
11. Access to healthcare for overseas military and families in remote locations.
12. Improving the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).
13. Protect our American Flag – pass the Flag Code Modernization Act of 2021.

Volunteered at Post 91 with planned activities and work parties, as needed.

#### Frank Pocci – AMVETS

- attended the Italian American War Veterans meeting
- attended the AMVETS meeting
- referred one individual to the VSC
- replaced a worn flag

#### James Riley – VFW

- February 1<sup>st</sup> – attended Catholic War Veterans meeting
- February 2<sup>nd</sup> – Western Reserve National Cemetery - rifle salute for five military funerals
- February 4<sup>th</sup> – VFW Quarterly District 7 meeting
- February 9<sup>th</sup> - Western Reserve National Cemetery - rifle salute for seven military funerals
- February 10<sup>th</sup> – attended military funeral of former Marine and Police Chief in Vermillion – presented Battlefield Cross to wife
- February 10<sup>th</sup> – visited retired Navy Vet friend at Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky
- February 12<sup>th</sup> – Guitars 4 Vets: 2 individual lessons and 1 monthly group lesson
- February 13<sup>th</sup> – presided over JVCOCC meeting
- February 19<sup>th</sup> – Guitars for Vets: 1 individual lesson
- February 20<sup>th</sup> – VFW Post 2533 monthly meeting
- February 26<sup>th</sup> - Guitars for Vets: 1 individual lesson
- February 26<sup>th</sup> – conducted VFW casket side service for deceased Post member – delivered battlefield cross and VSC flag case to family
- February 27<sup>th</sup> – prepared VFW hall for family of deceased Post member after funeral mass
- February 28<sup>th</sup> – picked up and delivered a donated wheelchair to Vietnam Veteran’s house

#### Bob Potts – VVA

- worked with the family of deceased Post President for services – issued flag case
- prepared chapter newsletter with information about the Post President and published that the next meeting will be held March 28<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m. at Post 385
- spoke to members about a new president – position has been filled with temporary president

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

There are no updates on the Veterans Service Commission’s current space. The final documents for the new headquarters are in review. Once reviews are completed, the plans will go out for bid. It is time to upgrade computer equipment. Computers will be replaced once the VSC relocates to the new building.

There are no updates for mobile vehicle use or the Parma CBOC. The transportation report and recommendation to the board is a work in progress. The VSC is waiting for quotes for active shooter and team building/diversity training.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

The 2025 Budget was discussed. Budget items discussed include assistance to Cleveland State, an in-house tuition assistance program and a new vehicle for the VSC.

On March 5, 2024, the VA expanded healthcare to include increased eligibility for VA healthcare by the PACT Act. Executive Director Reiss was asked to find out more about who this will impact and what group they will be in at the VA.

The VSC received a request for tuition assistance for Cleveland State veterans. The VSC is unable to assist in this way, but Cleveland State will be made aware of the tuition assistance program once details are determined.

After discussion, the Board made the decision to close the office on April 8<sup>th</sup> for the solar eclipse due to expected increased traffic and visitors to the city.

**GOOD OF THE ORDER:**

Deputy Director Williams expressed concern regarding client complaints of prejudiced treatment by two staff members. Mr. Williams will have a discussion with both employees.

Commissioner Riley complimented C. Reese and J. Rosine for their service to veterans.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

A motion was made by Frank Pocci to go into Executive Session to consider employment of a public employee and a client case and appeal. Motion seconded by Bob Potts.

^YES: Baher, Pocci, Potts, Riley. NAYS: None. Motion carried. (10:30 a.m.)

The Board came out of Executive Session and returned to the regular order of business at 10:42 a.m. In Executive Session the Board discussed a client case and a temporary position to assist the IT Manager. The Executive and Deputy Directors were advised on how to proceed.

With no further business, a motion was made by Bob Potts to adjourn the meeting at 12:25 p.m. Motion seconded by Frank Pocci.

AYES: Baher, Pocci, Potts, Riley. NAYS: None. Motion carried.



Mel Baher, President



Frank Pocci, Secretary

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Filing claims with the Dept. of  
Veterans' Affairs/Memorial Affairs:  
Financial Assistance Manager:  
Executive Director:  
Deputy Director:  
Commissioners:

Melinda Halliburton, Service Office Mgr. (216-698-2639)  
Jeanne Bell (216)-698-2635  
Jon Reiss (216-698-2611)  
Feronne Williams (216-698-3845)  
Mary Kitko, Secretary to the Board (216-698-2651)